

# FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

*news*  
August 2016

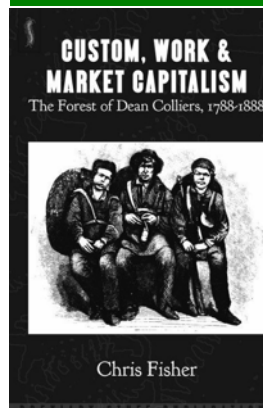
- Join us on 10th September at New Fancy for the unveiling of the commemorative stone - full details inside

## Also inside

- Ruth Hirst's World War Two Experiences
- Cecile Hunt writes on 'Searching Out Local History'



## Book Review with Ian Wright and Cheryl Mayo



This is an excellent study of the Forest of Dean Colliers from 1788 to 1888. Chris Fisher is an ex-Australian miner. He carried out the research for this book as part of doctorate at Warwick University which was completed in 1978. The book describes how during the eighteenth century a community of free miners grew up on Crown land in the Forest of Dean. Their right to live and work in this region was neither conferred by the Crown nor by private employers or landowners; it became a customary right. During the nineteenth century the Crown began to erode customary rights existing on its land and replace it with forms of market capitalism such as those which sprang up in the private sector during this period. This book examines how this transition was made and how the free miners responded to the encroachments of market capitalism. It provides important insights into the way in which the body of custom altered over time and into the fundamental relations of property, production and law in a society. The book is available from [www.breviarystuff.org.uk](http://www.breviarystuff.org.uk)  
Price £14.00 198pp *paperback* • 156x234mm ISBN 978-0-9929466-7-8

The latest *New Regard* is coming! And the range of articles means that, once again, there is something for everyone. From ancient oaks, to Grande Dames, to shipwrecks. Here's a preview:

In *Miners' Union*, Christine Martyn writes of the dramatic ups and downs of the coal industry, in the 1890s, including the lead up to the 1893 lock-out and strike; and of the diligent work of long-term Forest MP, Sir Charles Dilke to improve the lot of the working man.

Pete Ralph and Keith Walker give us a brief but comprehensive history of the *New Fancy Colliery*, where the first shafts were sunk in about 1852. Pete's and Keith's article then tells us how under a Forestry Commission initiative the New Fancy site came to be integrated into the Forest landscape we know today.

For those with an interest in earlier history, Professor Nicholas Orme writes about *Joan Greyn-dour, and her school at Newland*, which she founded in 1446. The article follows both Joan's long life and her founding and nurturing of the grammar school.

In an entirely different vein, John Powell tells us in *Shipwreck*, the story of Charlie Lewis, an 18 year-old Lydney sailor who was thought to be the only survivor of the shipwrecked *Enterkin*, a fully-rigged sailing ship. The tragedy occurred only three days into the ship's journey from Hull to Brisbane, Australia, just before Christmas 1891.

In *Interesting and Notable Trees of Dean*, Ian Standing writes of ancient oaks, following on from articles originally published in 1986 and 1987; Allan Ockenden writes of the *Mierystock and FoD branch railway* - many pictures and maps; and Averil Kear tells us the history of *Mitcheldean Congregational Chapel*, whilst Mary Atkins writes about *Clanna House* in Alvington.

We hope to have this latest *New Regard* on sale at the New Fancy stone unveiling on 10th September (please bring your membership card to obtain the discount) but most definitely at the Society's AGM on 8th October, and afterwards at meetings or via our website.

## The **NEW REGARD**

The journal of the  
Forest of Dean Local History Society

NEW FANCY COLLIERY  
THE SITE OF SHAFT NO. 2  
1852 - 1944  
Peak Production 500 tons per day  
Employed up to 700 workers  
15 lives lost  
FODLHS-2016

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**Editor:**

Keith Walker  
51 Lancaster Drive  
Lydney  
GL15 5SJ  
01594 843310  
[NewsletterEditor@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:NewsletterEditor@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

**Chair:**

Simon Moore  
01594 840521  
[Chair@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:Chair@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

**Treasurer:**

Cecile Hunt  
01594 842164  
[Treasurer@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:Treasurer@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

**Secretary:**

Chris Sullivan  
01594 860197  
[Secretary@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

**Website:**

[forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](http://forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

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## Editors Notes

Firstly let me explain the changes you will see inside this edition of the Society News publication. Previously when booking and order forms have been included, they have been printed separately and then included in the envelope containing the News publication. From this edition any booking, order or renewal forms will be included as the middle pages when the News publication is printed. All you then have to do is remove the forms, complete and return as necessary. These changes have been made in order to help reduce our considerable printing costs.

The front cover shows a view of New Fancy dating from around 1974 when work was underway to convert New Fancy from a coal mine into an amenity site. It is 40 years this year since the official opening of New Fancy Amenity Site took place. Thanks to Pete Ralph for allowing us to use the photo. Incidentally Pete was involved with the work that took place at New Fancy at that time and you can meet him during the afternoon of 10th September after the commemorative stone is unveiled at New Fancy. See the news pages for more details about the unveiling and other events taking place then.

Recently former Society Secretary and Meetings Secretary Ruth Hirst passed away. Ruth was a friend of mine, and she was a formidable local historian, making many contributions to our New Regard publication. After being brought up on her family farm in Bream, shortly after WW2 Ruth left the area to live in Newquay, Cornwall. Ruth became a member of Newquay Old Cornwall Society in 1950 and just four years later she became the Recorder, a role which encompasses archivist and librarian of records. In recognition of her contribution to documenting Cornwall's history Ruth was created a Bard of the Cornish Gorsedd in 1971. Her bardic name of Covathor Cay Noweth (Recorder of Newquay) was a fitting epithet. Ruth returned to live on her family farm, with her sister Barbara in 1985, and continued her interest in local history. I have included Ruth's 'WW2 Experiences' as a tribute to her in the centre pages of this edition.

*Keith Walker*

*Short pieces of news, views, and opinions for the Newsletter are always very welcome. Every effort will be made to reproduce articles as presented but the Editor reserves the right to edit as necessary. The Editor will assume that all necessary authorisation for attachments, photographs etc has been obtained and the FODLHS will not be held liable in the case of a subsequent query.*

## News From The Chair with Simon Moore



Welcome to this edition of our quarterly newsletter and I hope you are having a good summer so far. Our summer walks and visits to date have been well attended and I am pleased to say that our August coach trip is now fully booked, thank you to all of you who have signed up and are supporting this very popular annual day out.

Thank you to Jo O'Hanlon who has agreed to join the Society committee; and to remind you that we have other vacancies if you feel you can step forward to join us and take an active part in running the society.

You don't need to be an established history buff, but you do need to be willing to join in and keep this Society going. We are still looking for somebody with IT skills and somebody to help Sue Gordon-Smith with publications, in particular, but you do not need to commit to take on any particular role to start with, simply come along to a meeting and see what happens!

I would draw your attention to the announcement and details later in this publication, regarding the event planned for the New Fancy site, and 'The Stone' on Saturday 10th September, which coincides with and will be part of the Heritage Open Day scheme, when in addition to an unveiling ceremony by our President, Baroness Jan Royall; we will also be launching our comprehensive guide to the whole site. This is an important site to illustrate the heritage of the Forest of Dean, as it has so many things to offer, being close to the centre of the Forest, is a haven for wildlife, with good access and parking; but it also has the geo map, the miners memorial and tangible, and safe, remains of the past mining activity. Please do come along on the 10th to support this event.

Sourcing a selection of speakers for our regular winter meetings is always a matter of debate at our committee meetings; and whilst lists of speakers are published and we share information with other history groups, we are always on the look out for something new and something different to bring to you. If you know of anybody who has a good yarn to tell, some research to share; somebody that you have heard speak and enjoyed, then please contact one of the committee members and pass on the information. Perhaps you have a story to tell, some archive footage that needs an airing, have an idea of something that would be of interest but don't know quite how to get it out there.....well talk to us, we have lots of experienced people who would help direct and guide you, or take on the challenge of pulling together the presentation on your behalf. This doesn't need to be a full hour slot it could be a short item for the 20 minute slot after tea, or an article for one of our publications. I've said it before, and I'll keep reminding you, this is your society, and we would really like your input, suggestions, stories, family history, recollections to be shared and recorded.

Finally I would like to remind you all that our regular talks programme starts up again on Saturday 3rd September with a talk on 'the Canal women and their lives', followed by a Friday evening talk by Jim Chapman on the 'Perry Pear' and our AGM on Saturday 8th October followed by a talk by one of our vice presidents, Ian Pope, on 'The Crawshays and their coal mines'. I look forward to welcoming as many of you as possible to these events.





## MEMBERSHIP

The Society offers a warm welcome to the following new members, or returning members: Andy Moir, Jason Griffiths, Margaret Yeates and David Price. We hope you very much enjoy the benefits the Society brings.

You may have noticed that the inside of this newsletter contains your **renewal form**. Our membership year runs from 1 October to 30 September, so please complete the form and bring it along with you to our indoor meetings on 3rd September, the AGM on 8th October, or - last chance - the 12th November. If you forget the form, come and see me anyway. **Membership cards will be posted with the November newsletter**. Please note that members who have not renewed by the time of the January 2017 newsletter, will not receive one.

And of course it wouldn't be a Membership Secretary's report without a request for more members to step up and volunteer to be part of our committee. Come along to a meeting and see what you think! Please call me on 01594 510 533 or any of the Committee members (details on the membership card and in this newsletter), or drop us an email. We'd love to hear from you.

*Cheryl Mayo, Membership Secretary*

Members can order in print issues of the New Regard from the online 'eshop', simply select the 'New Regard' tab at [store.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](http://store.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

*Members can obtain a discount, by using the voucher code when prompted.*

*Note that the voucher code will change to 'Aylburton' on 1st August 2016.*

## News from the Gloucestershire Local History Association

The huge HLF-funded improvement project at the Gloucester Archives is now well underway. Old buildings are being knocked down and replaced by new, purpose built facilities that will improve both the ability to store artefacts under perfect conditions and the experience of researchers using the Archives. But as a consequence there is now a period of a few months whilst only limited resources are available. However, it is hoped that by early 2017 the research room will be moved into the new facilities.

The second phase of the project will include the new Gloucestershire Heritage Hub. The onsite Hub hopes to be operational by the end of 2017. There will also be an online Hub and partners, such as the GLHA, are taking part in plans for the development of the new website and social networking platforms.

New project staff are being appointed to work with, amongst others, local history groups to ensure members' requirements will be met. Further updates will follow in future newsletters.

The next GLHA history day will be Saturday 18th March 2017 in Churchdown Community Hall. The topic for the day will be "Gardens for Food, Fun and Flowers."

*Mary Sullivan*



## Unveiling the Stone! New Fancy September 10th, 2016, 10.45 am to 4 pm

In May, the stone which had been kindly donated by Jon Tainton to the Society to house a commemorative plaque for the New Fancy mine, was moved into its final place by local builder Keith Bell and his men. Since then, we have been working to put together a programme for the official unveiling, which will be on September 10th, at New Fancy, by our President, Baroness Jan Royall. This recognition of the New Fancy Colliery highlights one more aspect of this site, where we

already have the Geomap - which celebrates the geological and industrial history of the Dean; and the Miners' Memorial - erected to the memory of all those who lost their lives in the coal and iron mines and quarries of the Dean. Together with additional material being added to our website, including a downloadable 'site guide' for New Fancy, we hope to bring a more coherent approach to providing a history of the Forest mining industry.

The unveiling will be part of Heritage Open Week, so we will be making a full day of it with Society members on hand to give us tours of the Geomap, information about the Miners' Memorial and also talks from the RSPB viewpoint, with its extensive panorama of the Forest. These will all be informal chats, and answering questions. We will have a stand selling our publications, including the Mines Trails walking maps. Most importantly, we hope to launch the next *New Regard* here, as it features an article by Pete Ralph and Keith Walker about New Fancy Colliery and how the area came to be turned into an amenity site. Take a look at the programme shown below, and do make time to come along. Bring a picnic, weather permitting! And, a plea! If you can help out on the day, even just for an hour, please call Cheryl Mayo on 01594 510 533 or Keith Walker on 01594 843 310.

### New Fancy - Saturday 10th Sept 2016 - Programme

10.45 am	Parkend Silver Band
11.15 am	Unveiling of New Fancy Memorial Stone: The Rt Hon Baroness Royall of Blaisdon
11.30 am - 12 noon	Parkend Silver Band

#### Concurrent activities (from 11.30 am on)

GeoMap Tours:	Geology and mining explained!
Miners' Memorial:	What is this?
Viewpoint:	What do we see from here? How was the site developed?
Memorial Stone:	Questions & Answers on New Fancy Colliery
FoD stand:	Publications; Membership information

4.00 pm	Finish
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## Ruth Hirst's World War Two Experiences *as told to Keith Walker*

When I was young, Sundays at home were special – no sewing or knitting or cards were played. This changed with the Second World War when we were allowed to knit comforts for the troops. I remember feeling very ‘let down’ when the Prime Minister came back in 1938 from Munich with his ‘Peace in Our Time’. Of course by the next year we were at war with the Germans; I hadn’t realised at the time how dreadful it would be.

Later, in 1939, Yardley Grammar School had been evacuated from Birmingham to Lydney. We shared the Grammar school with them – we had mornings and they took over for afternoons. We’d moved to Pastor’s Hill Farm, Bream by then, and as they didn’t think I would learn much under the circumstances, I was allowed to leave as Mother was ill, and I ran the house for her at the age of 14.

I remember my class mates being rushed out of school when Queen Mary drove by to visit Lydney Park – she didn’t look or smile at us cheering her, and I was later told that her face would have cracked if she had smiled as it was so heavily painted up! I understand that Queen Juliana of the Netherlands was staying at Lydney Park, having escaped to England. I believe that Lord Bleislöe moved into the Dower House and the Royals had the mansion.

I used to go to Lydney at least once a week for Dad, and it was whilst waiting for a bus at the Cross, I heard the American Army Band coming and whilst the main lot turned down by the bank, the chap with the big drum kept straight on, till he realised he was on his own and dodged down the other side of the Cross to rejoin them!



*Ruth Hirst in her NAAFI uniform*

In 1940, I used to walk up to the village across our fields, and I did always wonder where I could hide if a German plane came over. We always knew when Coventry, Liverpool or Birmingham had a raid as the German planes seemed to fly up over us in Bream, and by listening to the 8am news, I was able to say who’d ‘got it’, how many planes shot down and how many of ours had been lost – it was one of my ‘jobs’. The nearest, thank goodness, that we came to bombs was when two were dropped between the two railway lines at Whitecroft. We moved downstairs to sleep after that, and I can remember Mother sticking brown paper at the windows in case of bombs, the idea being to stop the glass splintering, I suppose. Before I joined the war effort, I helped mother in the house. We were fortunate that relatives in Canada used to send us parcels of food. Both Dad and Barbara (my sister) as farmers had extra rations, but how mother fed us all, I don’t know.

My sister, 4 years older, joined the WLA (Womens Land Army) before the war on condition (Dad’s orders!) that she could stay at home, and we often had other WLA girls here on their days off, especially from the Forestry School at Parkend. Dad had me made ‘reserved occupation – farming’ without asking me how I felt. I guess I made myself objectionable wanting to join up, so

much so that they eventually agreed to me going. However by that time the WRENS, which I wanted to join, only had vacancies for cooks – and I had had enough of that – so I joined the NAAFI instead, but only went to RAF Innsworth, between Gloucester and Cheltenham. In those days, one did as one’s parents said and no arguing!

There were four canteens on site, being Permanent Holding Unit (PHU) 1771R. One job I had in Naafi was in the Beer bar and it is amazing how I learnt and got to be expert at knocking the bung into a beer barrel (wooden in those days), and putting in the tap. We did have help getting not only the barrels in, but also coke for the 4 stoves in the kitchen.

I think we were paid 27/6d (old money) a week; plus board and lodging and our uniform. Apart from the Beer Bar there was also the Tea Bar and Nett (Cigarettes) Bar – the latter run by a girl who was a stickler for the boys only having their due ration, the rest going into store. One of us had to take over the Nett Bar when she was off and the boys always enjoyed that as we got ‘rid’ of the stock she had built up. In the mornings the clientele were mostly office staff; we had to fill up their jugs of tea and count out the cakes needed for each lot. In the evenings when we were open, and when all three bars were busy, as I was on the beer bar, I often went round the canteen collecting the empty glasses which had to be washed later. However if you had the evening off you could go into town if you wanted to.

Once – soon after the war in Europe was over – we were short of both goods and staff, and not knowing that all the other canteens were closed, we’d had enough and decided not to open that night. We went I think, to camp cinema and after planned to go for fish and chips supper, but one of the girls wanted to put something warmer on before we went out, so we all went back into the canteen to find Mr Wilson there. Well, we then learnt that we had left the camp “uncanteened”. Subsequently quite a few ‘home-truths’ came out and it ended with us having a new manageress (Miss Elwick)!

I was still in the NAAFI at Easter, twelve months or so before the war ended, and I had a pass to go to London, where I stayed at Hampstead with an Aunt. A boyfriend (Johnny Hans Leuters), who was in the Free Dutch Air Force, was with me and I remember going to the Rainbow Rooms with him – it was where the Yanks used to go, too. It seemed, even then, very grotty and in need of painting and repairs.

On Victory in Europe day, I was still in the NAAFI. I saw three shows (we obviously weren’t ‘open’ that day), but only remember one of them, ‘Big Bill Campbell and his Rocky Mountaineers’ probably in a theatre in Cheltenham rather than in camp; what a way to celebrate! But it was marvellous to see them as I had only heard them on radio previously.

I think when hostilities ceased, so did most peoples’ ‘thinking of others’ – it was usually self first, second and last. I guess everyone was too busy existing to bother about anyone else.





## Searching Out Local History *by Cecile Hunt*



What is 'local history'? It is the nuts and bolts of history as a whole; the study of people, place and community. The what, where, why and how of people settling in a certain area; moulding of landscapes; if the physical setting effected people's lives; how did they work, rest and play; what types of religious worship did they take part in; their social relationships and attitudes are just a few of the questions that take a researcher down the road of reconstructing the history of a place. Always remember, what happened locally was invariably not in isolation to the rest of the country or the world. Reconstructing the history of an area requires an open and enquiring mind, curiosity and patience. A system

of referencing information gleaned from a myriad of sources is good; so the original source can be found again in the future. Referencing published work is especially important for verifying where that information was obtained and for readers to be confident in the information they are reading - plus for your own benefit; trying to remember 'what was I looking at/reading when I found that info in that note I made?' is very frustrating! Read as much printed information on the subject you are interested in as possible. Hopefully some of the printed information you have been reading has been referenced back to where the author found it. Follow the reference; it may lead you to another book (more info) with another reference, or to a document lodged in an archive depository.

One good place to start researching anything to do with the Forest of Dean is the Victoria County History (VCH) of Gloucester Volume 5 (Forest of Dean) - local libraries carry copies or access it online at: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/glos/vol5>, it is well referenced and easy to read. Go to <http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk>, for more on the Victoria County History itself. Many books are available on the Forest - too many to list here. One of the most prolific authors in the Forest of Dean was Cyril Hart, his books cover many areas of Forest history. Then there is the society's annual publication The New Regard; a myriad of articles covering an immense range of subjects published over many years - visit society's website for an index of subjects, volumes 1 to 30. Aerial photos are a good resource material, over 4 million photos covering nearly 100 years at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/imagesbooks/archive/collections/aerial-photos/> and <http://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/>

Keep an open mind when researching. Try and work your way back to original documents. Take account of authors putting a skew on any work produced. Online information is good but not always accurate, get back to the origination of any information found online to verify it.

Since the last article on 'Water in Mines (not Gas!)' additional information has been discovered. Although Methane gas was not present in FoD mines, unlike other mines in the country, a gas called Blackdamp was and so were canaries. Dave Tuffley (long time member of the society, mining history researcher and a caver) has provided the following; *"I [Dave] have seen a picture of a canary in a cage that was used in Northern United Colliery to detect Blackdamp (deficiency of oxygen and increase of carbon dioxide) This is a common gas in the coal seam and is caused by the rotting of pit props and other organic matter. The canaries were used in nearly all the major collieries. I have at least 4 or 5 cases where there were fatalities due to asphyxiation due to Blackdamp"*. Thank you to Dave for this interesting information.

## Geomap Machinations *explained by Liz Berry*

As Project Managers of the Geomap during its construction, Dave and I are happy to generally maintain it. Once a year, we clean up the stone, using dilute bleach on the sandstone which tends to grow algae on the surface, and applying dilute brick acid to the limestone to treat any limescale. We repaint the coal seams, the rivers and the tramroads as necessary. We also dig out any growth of plant life from between the cracks. We even attempt to clear the path to the map from the general boar damage. This year, as usual, we did our usual clean and polish at the end of April. On return from holiday, Cherry Lewis, who had visited the map, told us that someone had loosened and removed several of the steel discs marking the site of iron mines, had returned them in the wrong places, and taken one. Why anyone had done this, is a complete mystery. We contacted Simon (Moore) and Cecile (Hunt) to approve funding for replacement and remounting said steel discs, and then contacted Phil Davis, who made the originals. He duly produced a beautiful new number 16 disc, (just like the old one!), and we then contacted Martin at Damsells in Bream, the monumental masons who made the basalt and marble discs, and fitted all the discs on the map. The basalt and marble discs were set in using cement, but the steel discs were originally set in using a latex based adhesive. On discussion with Martin, Phil and David Yeates, the sculptor, who carved the rock map, it was decided to use cement on the eleven loose steel discs. Martin duly came and made an excellent job of setting them in the map. The map is now looking good again, with all its bits in place. If you see anyone else trying to vandalise or steal any bits, give us a call!

*Liz and Dave Berry (01594 861729)*

## Meetings In Review *with Cheryl Mayo and Keith Walker*



On **Saturday 11 June** eighteen intrepid explorers met Cecile Hunt at the Portway Park & Ride terminus to start their adventure **exploring Clifton, its bridge and environs**. First travelling by bus, the party made its way to the Camera Obscura and observation platform. The Obscura proved an interesting visit. With nine or ten people packed around the viewer, the doors of the little room were closed to offer superb views of the Suspension Bridge and the Gorge. Most people also chose to clamber down the 200 feet long tunnel to the Giants Cave, which again offered fantastic views of the Bridge.

After lunch the party reassembled at Clifton Suspension Bridge where a very knowledgeable guide provided a potted history of the bridge. The bridge is built to a design by William Henry Barlow and John Hawkshaw, based on an earlier design by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. It is a grade I listed building and forms part of the B3129 road. Despite construction starting in 1831 the bridge was not completed until 1864. The bridge is 9.46metres wide and 412 metres long and the roadway is some 75 metres above high water level. Roller-mounted "saddles" at the top of each tower allow movement of the three independent wrought iron chains on each side when loads pass over the bridge. The bridge deck is suspended by 162 vertical wrought-iron rods in 81 matching pairs. After the explanation, the party walked across to the Visitor Centre to learn more about the competition to design the bridge, its construction and completion and how it is maintained today. Finally walking back across the bridge, Cecile explained how Hotwells in Clifton temporarily became a rival to Bath as a Georgian Spa. All in all a very enjoyable trip!

## Meetings In Review *continued*

It was a hot day on **Sunday 8th May**, when a group of about twenty Society members (and four dogs) took to the banks of the River Wye on a **walk from Stowfield up to English Bicknor and back**. Along the way, our leader, Geoff Davis, filled us in on many aspects of the fascinating history of the area.



We started at the old Temco factory, opened by Harold J Smith. Fine stainless steel wire was produced here to be used as heating elements for airmen's flying suits in WWI. Shortly after the war the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company took over the factory, still producing wire. We then crossed the road and walked alongside the Lydbrook Cable Works, erected in 1912 by the same Harold J Smith. In WW1 the Works produced 70,000 miles of cable for field communication. The business was bought in 1925 by Edison Swan Electric Company. During WW11, it possessed a machine for making lead alloy tube needed for PLUTO (Petroleum Lines UnderThe Ocean), which allowed fuel to be supplied to the Allied invasion force on the Continent from Britain. Mr Smith was a philanthropic employer who in September 1918 built a spacious dining hall, cloak rooms and bathrooms and lavatories. The war ended very shortly after and the slump in business led to Smith's connection with the factory ending with the Official Receiver coming in in 1920.

The group then strolled along the river bank. We were told the once top-secret story of the crash of the Halifax V9977 on 7th June 1942. The aircraft had been carrying a number of scientists testing highly secret radar equipment. The aircraft caught fire and crashed into a field at Lower Lydbrook on the Monastery side of the River Wye. All eleven on board were killed. Continuing via St Mary's Church to see the WW1 Memorial, our walk through the school and across the fields then took us past various houses where we learned something of the colourful lives of the previous occupants, including Mr Hugh Charles Newton, who died in 1982 aged 78. Known as an unassuming man, he was once a wealthy Vienna businessman, whose activities in combating Nazism in his country led to his imprisonment in Dachau and Buchenwald, and the shooting of his wife, mother and daughter in a labour camp. He escaped, arriving in England after the declaration of war in 1939. His fluency in eight languages ensured he was put to use by Army Intelligence. He carried out nine parachute missions into Germany, where he obtained vital pieces of information. After the war, he married an English Bicknor local girl and came to live in the village. From Buchenwald to English Bicknor - the Forest certainly holds many secrets!



On **Sunday 10th July**, a dozen members joined Steve Cooper and Geoff Davis for a **walk around Pillowell**. Not a large village, but it kept us interested for a good couple of hours. We started at the new community centre, where we learned that the original WW1 memorial is not the stone monument there, but in fact the playing fields, which were levelled by unemployed miners. The recently demolished old green hut was constructed to keep the men away from the pubs. For those who feel nostalgic about the green hut, you don't have to go far

to find another one. For there, down the hill past the Old Bailey Inn and opposite the shops, is its doppelganger. Now used by Forest Brass, this large 'tin hut' was once the home of the Yorkley Onward Band. Internal fractures led to the original Pillowell Band splitting, with one group moving onward and upward to become Yorkley Onward Band. And, interestingly, Pillowell Band Hut is now actually at The Rudge in Yorkley.

Continuing down the hill we came to Stone Cottage, the home of Freda (Morse) Phipps who wrote about her WW1 experiences of growing up there, in her book *Early Days at Stone Cottage*. The gem, for me, was Pillowell Village Hall, tucked into its slot on the side of the hill amongst other buildings, it was once the Co-op bakery, next to the Co-op store. The Primitive Methodist Church had been opened specially for us. A compact and beautifully maintained nineteenth century church, with an unusual feature in the kitchen – the stone war memorial which was brought there from Yorkley Wood Church when that building became a private house in the 1960s.

Our thanks to Steve and Geoff for an entertaining and informative afternoon in a very charming village, and our especial thanks to Pete and Elaine Jackson (Elaine is F W Harvey's granddaughter) for inviting us back to Harvey's old home, Highview, for a welcome cup of tea.



We picked the perfect day and time for our **Beachley walk** – 7 pm on the hottest day of the year, **Tuesday 19th July**. Fourteen members met in the Old Ferry Inn car park for the start of our tour led by Tidenham History Group members, Richard and Carol Clammer, who have made a long study of this little village. Hidden away on its peninsula between the Wye and the Severn, virtually all of it now is Ministry of Defence land.

First, we visited the slipway, built in the late 1830s and one end of the Aust crossing. This is the shortest

stretch across the Severn and there has long been some sort of crossing here, with a ferry since about 900 AD, and used by coaches until the rival crossing at Black Rocks gained the railway. It also used to be a seaside resort, with people camping near the old slipway. We also caught a glimpse in the distance of the oldest physical remains in the area: St Tecla's chapel, thought to be 7th century, sitting on its tiny island. We wandered up the one road, stopping opposite the place where Beachley Lodge used to stand – the 'big house' of the village), until the Army demolished it and replaced it with a 1970s, flat roofed Officers Mess. We visited the Church and the tiny school and school-house, and found a small but immaculate Commonwealth War Graves cemetery, with graves dating from post WW1 through to Afghanistan, and including several German and Italian POWs from WW2. Now to the reason why this is MOD land: in Sept 1917, the powers-that-be decided England was losing too many ships against the German U-boats and came up with a plan to build prefabricated ships at three sites, one of which was Beachley (another was in Chepstow). The plans were elaborate and quickly, and incompletely, implemented with miles of railway line laid, and concrete block camps constructed for the 6,000 Engineers and 4,000 POWs brought in to do the work. No ships were ever built. But in order to execute this plan, the village was compulsorily acquired and 106 people were summarily booted out with two weeks notice, with nowhere to go and no immediate compensation.

Our thanks to Richard and Carol for a fascinating glimpse into a near, but not familiar, place.